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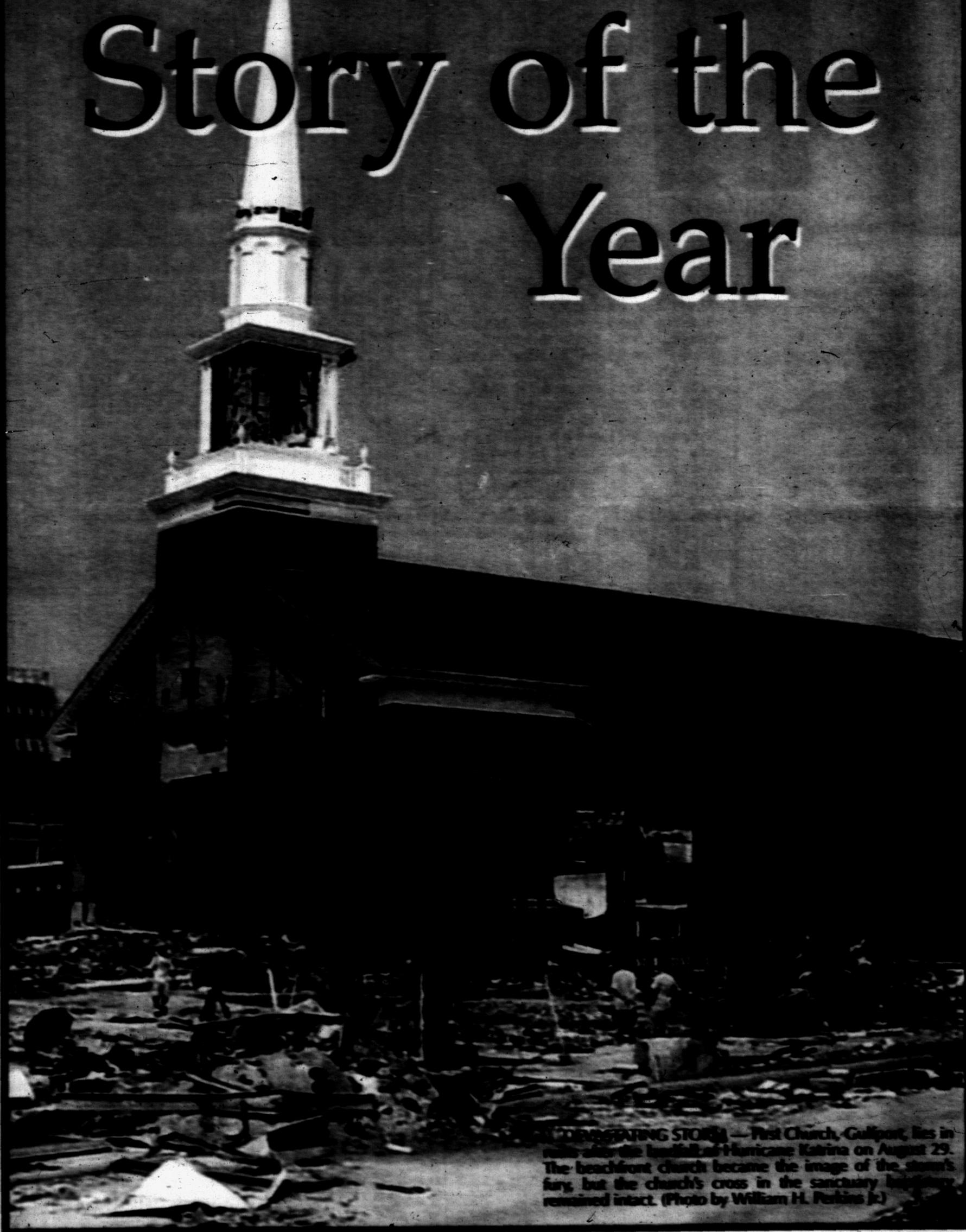
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Donations to hurricane relief effort

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Story of the Year



INTEGRATING STORM — First Church, Gulfport, lies in ruins after the landfall of Hurricane Katrina on August 29. The beachfront church became the image of the storm's fury, but the church's cross in the sanctuary has remained intact. (Photo by William H. Perkins Jr.)



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Story of the Year — for 2006

If a picture is truly worth a thousand words, the full-page photo of First Church, Gulfport, on the front of this special edition of The Baptist Record tells the Story of the Year as well as any image of Hurricane Katrina's devastation that has yet been published.

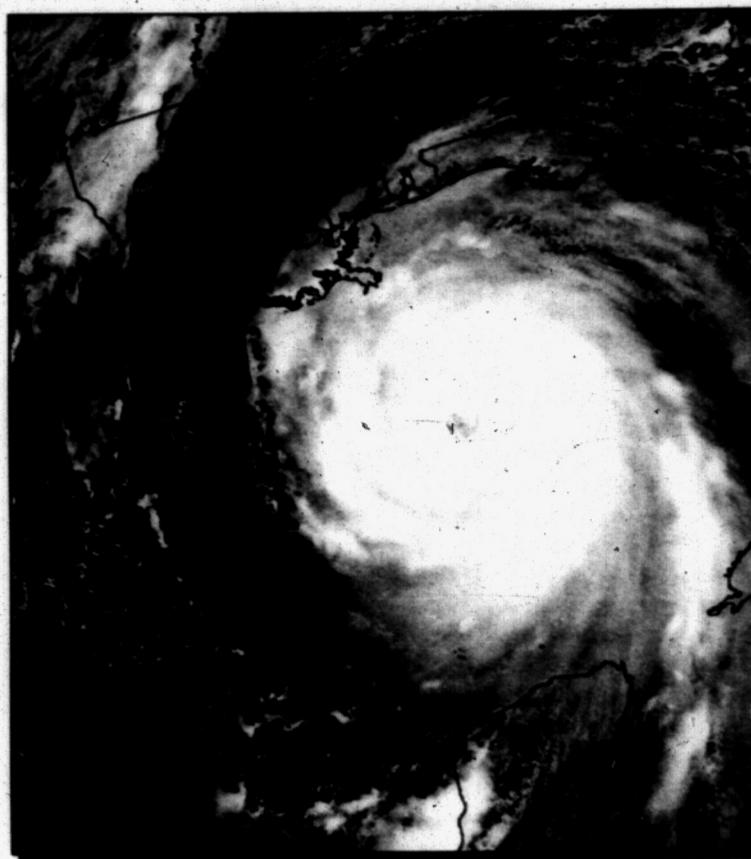
It tells the Story of the Year for 2005, but also for 2006. It tells the story of the year to come, as well as the year just past, because the recovery from this most devastating storm since Hurricane Camille in 1969 will consume all of 2006 — and many years beyond.

We can be thankful that Katrina, a Category 5 storm just a few hours before striking the Mississippi Gulf Coast, lost a little of her punch before coming ashore on August 29. In light of the complete devastation wrought even by her diminished fury, we should be very thankful.

The Mississippi Baptist response to the victims of Hurricane Katrina, a massive effort begun before Katrina's winds had died down, was soon joined by disaster relief units and volunteers from across the Southern Baptist Convention. The effort did not end when the victims' immediate needs were met for food, clothing, medical care, and other essential items and services.

That was just the beginning — a good beginning, but just the beginning. One need only drive west along Highway 90 from Pascagoula to the Louisiana state line to understand that there is much left to be done. The same observation holds up for miles inland, too, at places like Columbia, Laurel, Picayune, Poplarville, and Wiggins (to name only a few).

New Orleans, in its own world of hurt,



TAKING AIM — Hurricane Katrina bears down on the Mississippi Gulf Coast in this NASA satellite image captured at 7:20 a.m. on August 29. Damage estimates from the massive storm range into the hundreds of billions of dollars, with recovery expected to take at least a decade.

may have provided more dramatic video for the cameras, but it was Mississippi that took the brunt of the storm. Now that the initial crisis is over and the news media have left for more late-breaking stories with fresh visuals, most volunteers Baptist and otherwise returned to their homes by Christmas. Many won't be back, and the potential loss of momentum could be huge.

Mississippi Baptists must not let that happen. Hurricane Katrina occurred on our mother soil, and whether the human misery that has followed is fair is,

frankly, immaterial. What is material is whether we are up to the breathtaking challenge that has been put before us.

For everyone who has been to the coast and viewed the utter destruction poured out upon Waveland and so many other places, "breathtaking" doesn't begin to describe the challenge. Words simply fail.

The good news is that Mississippi Baptists are indeed up to the challenge. As national interest has fallen off, Mississippi Baptists' commitment has remained steady. Southern Baptists' commitment has remained steady. Mississippi Baptist volunteers' commitment has remained steady.

How better to reflect Jesus? As most of the rest of the country begins 2006 as years usually begin, this new year is different for almost every Mississippian who lives in the southern third of the state. Think about that — the southern third of the state. Now is the time for us to step up and help with more of our prayers, time, and treasure than ever before.

As Paul Crowley, pastor of Woolmarket Church, Biloxi, says, "What I'm seeing and what I'm hearing is that the people on the Gulf Coast, the people in Woolmarket, and in other areas, are very much aware of the fact that it's been the body of Christ that has been here to meet those immediate needs and to lend a helping hand."

Not the government, and not the casinos, but the body of Christ. May it always be so.

Editor's note: Subscribers who receive a special front page from their church will not be able to view the color version of the front page photo referenced in the first paragraph. To view the photo, visit www.mbc.org, click in the Hurricane Katrina box on the right, and then click on Hurricane Katrina photo gallery.

GUEST OPINION:

Embracing the 'new normal'

**By Laura Koch, member
First Church, Wiggins**

observed so many different things — traffic congestion in my small town, debris, destruction, FEMA people, long lines at the local stores, many new faces — I had to agree with her.

We were now facing a "new normal."

The news from our sister churches on the Gulf Coast was not good. They had suffered such devastation in their corporate church life and the personal lives of their members that I was positive that it would be a long time before they returned to normal. Surely meeting under shade trees and in schoolhouses and homes could not seem normal, but even in

these difficult circumstances I heard from members of different congregations that their church had never been so alive.

The "things" had been stripped away and the meaning of church was beginning to emerge. Programs, meetings, and buildings were not the most important things any more. Precious time was now being spent with family and with helping others deal with this tragedy. Some were even distributing boxes of food and supplies to the less fortunate along with a word of encouragement.

Lost people in an area of the state where 74% of the population is unchurched were more

open to the Gospel than ever before. People were being saved!

What do we as healthy churches do to contribute during the storm aftermath days? I would suggest that we do not return to "normal" and business as usual, to the neglect of the hurting in our midst. There are many new people in our communities that need a touch from the Master. Maybe we are the ones to do that.

Let's get outside the walls of our churches and beyond what's comfortable and take advantage of this unique opportunity we have been handed to present Jesus to a hurting population.

To whom much is given, much is expected. My prayer is, "God, deliver us from our normal way of doing church and convict us to do Your will in these most unusual days. May the 'new normal' be multitudes finding You and Savior!"

Koch has served on the finance committee and the missions director search committee for Gulf Coast Association, which encompasses Stone, Hancock, and Harrison Counties in south Mississippi. She may be contacted at laurakoch@bellsouth.net.

Katrina leaves challenges, opportunities

By Tony Martin
Associate Editor

It may well be that future generations reckon time in Mississippi and along the state's Gulf Coast in terms of "B.K." and "A.K." — as in "Before Katrina" and "After Katrina."

In ways immeasurable, the horrific storm of 2005 altered the landscape of much of the state not only physically, but in other, more intangible ways as well. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, 1969's Camille was the benchmark. Now Katrina has established herself as the new criteria, the hurricane against which others will be judged.

In the first days after the storm, Mississippi Baptists were quick to respond.

"For Mississippi Baptists and Southern Baptists, this was our finest hour. They responded in unison. Folks saw the magnitude of the hurt and understood, 'This is what we're about,'" said Jim Didlake, director of the Men's Ministry Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) and Mississippi Baptists' disaster relief coordinator.

Referring to the Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief Task Force, Don Gann, consultant in the Men's Ministry Department, said, "Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief was only a small part of what Mississippi Baptists did. We were able to work in tandem with local churches and individuals who were doing their own ministry. For instance, we learned of a church with 25 members who were feeding 150 people a day for a while. We worked together as never before."

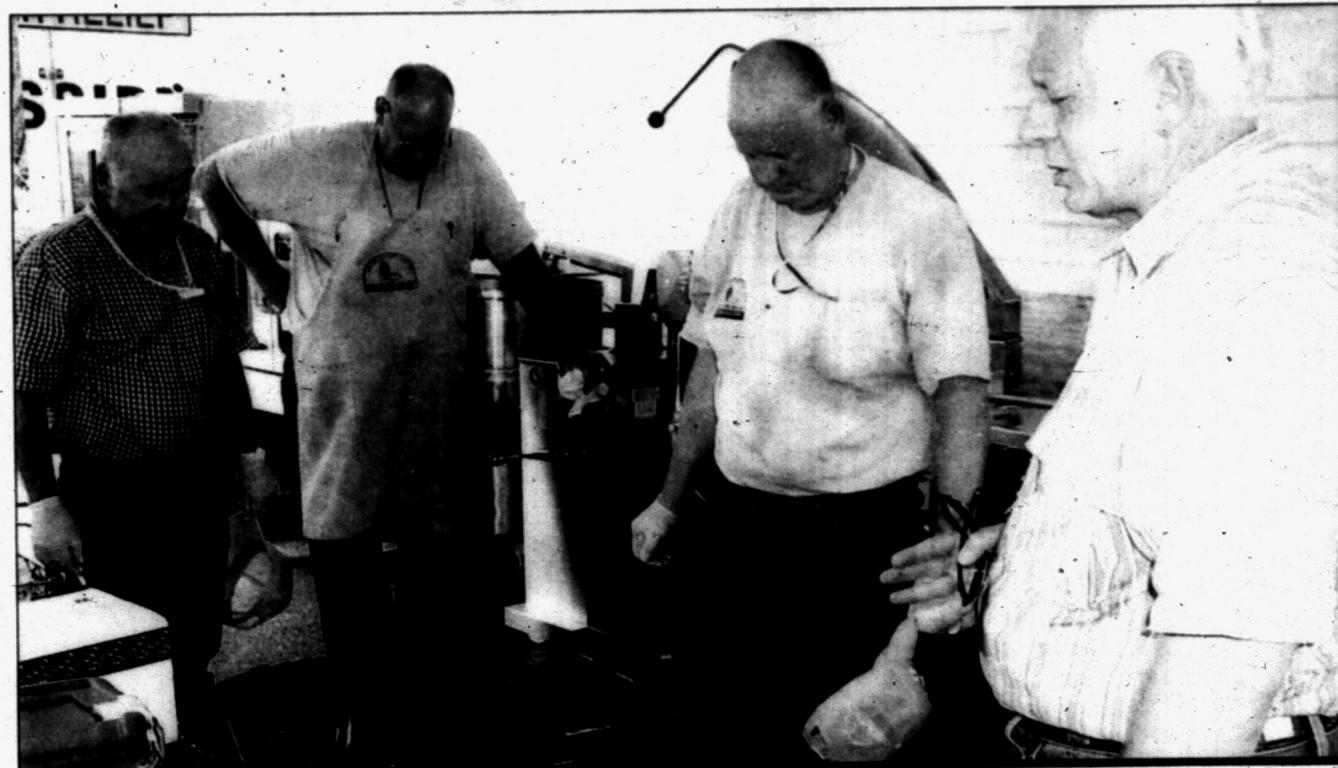
When did Mississippi Baptists come to understand just how big Katrina was to be?

"We were at Camp Garaywa (in Clinton) on Monday, August 28," said Gann. "We were experiencing 70-80 mile-per-hour winds, and I knew then it was going to be bad on the coast."

"I knew we were in trouble two days out," said Didlake. "I've watched enough of these things over the years to know Katrina was going to be the worst we'd seen."

Within 24 hours of Katrina's landfall, Mississippi Baptists responded.

"I was working incident command at Garaywa," said Gann. "Early on, we had trouble getting food, fuel, potties, everything. Our usual supply lines were shut down. I knew that within days, we were about to run out of diesel fuel for the generator on the feeding unit at First Church, Biloxi. Then, out of the blue, we got a call from Mark Vincent, pastor of Clark-Venable Church in Newton. He said they had 500 gallons of diesel, and did we need it. So he got it to the feeding unit, and was able to take some to another unit."



PRAYER FOR STRENGTH — Bobby Welch (right), president of the Southern Baptist Convention, prays September 1 with members of the Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief Task Force operating the Task Force's mass feeding unit from First Church, Biloxi. Welch, pastor of First Church, Daytona Beach, Florida, spent the day inspecting the devastation created by Hurricane Katrina and offering his support for the relief work being provided by Southern Baptists. (Photo by William H. Perkins Jr.)

Stories of little miracles like this abound. "We had water delivered from the Delta," said Didlake. "Normal channels of procurement were clogged, but the Lord provided. Eighteen wheelers full of necessities would call and say, 'We're coming — where do you need us?'"

"I can't tell you of the times stuff came at the last minute," said Gann. "Ultimately, the system became unclogged and everything ran just fine."

The Adopt-a-Church ministry, which matches churches and individuals with churches damaged or destroyed by Katrina, has also been effective.

According to Tom Prather, MBCB Director of Church and Community Impact, 199 Mississippi churches and 1056 churches from out-of-state have partnered with 228 churches with needs. "This only represents the churches that have gone through our department," Prather said. "Many more churches have helped out."

Data is still being compiled — data that shows the magnitude of the disaster. For example:

- Eighty percent of Mississippi was without power. Sixty counties were without power for more than a week, and 52 out of 82 counties were declared Federal Disaster Areas.

- Cell phone service was mostly out south of Jackson for five days. Land lines were down over 65% of the state.

- Fuel supplies were drained in evacuations. Power was out at fuel stations across the state. Because of the power outages, fuel was in short supply for some time.

- The usual food supply chains were ineffective.

Warehouses in the state were closed, there was no purchasable food in the state, and the Disaster Relief Task Force's partners were unable to assist with food supplies for up to two weeks.

- Water systems were down for seven to ten days in many areas, and when supplies returned, they were still unusable because of pollution.

- Seven out of ten initial church sites (sites to be used in disaster relief) were unusable, as were many backup sites. Mississippi Baptists' volunteer base was acutely impacted by the storm, and up to 50,000 homes were destroyed or unusable.

- Most tellingly, the spontaneous responses of local churches filled in the gaps where the Disaster Relief Task Force couldn't place feeding units. Out of a projected need for 65-70 units, only 28 units were able to be deployed.

- There is no way we can express thanks to the hundreds of churches that fed and took in folks," said Didlake. "We have no way of knowing who did what, and it was the spontaneous efforts of local churches that filled in the gaps where we could not place feeding units.

- We just can't say too much about the support we got from Baptists across the state.

- "We even had a great medical response," said Gann. "We had volunteer doctors on the coast making house calls!"

- An amazing outpouring of support has been processed through the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board for disaster relief ministries in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, according to Barri A. Shirley, MBCB Associate Executive Director for Resource Services.



MISSISSIPPI
BAPTISTS

THE SECOND FRONT PAGE

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KATRINA CONTINUES

We have passed the four-month mark since Katrina arrived on the Gulf Coast and still she is a daily topic of discussion. I am not talking about just among the folks who have been directly affected, but nationally she is still in the spotlight. In this age of indescribable speed and unending communication, disasters usually have a rather short shelf life. Three months past Katrina, I picked up the national newspaper, USA Today, and began to read the front-page stories about Katrina. Over three months had passed and the major news outlets were still having feature reports on Katrina including information about families waiting on trailers, decisions about the rebuilding of levies, and FEMA's ambivalent feelings about decision-making related to this storm and the millions who were affected by it.

In the days just following the storm's visit, I was talking with some veterans of disaster relief efforts. I asked them about the flood of care, help, provisions, and offers to help that were coming in day and night. They told me that normally that only lasts for a week to 10 days, or maybe two weeks, or as long as it was featured in the news people would continue to have concern. They were partly right in that people continue to have concern as long as it is a news item of significance, but they had no idea that this monster disaster would continue to stay



Directions

Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

on our minds and heavy on our hearts for months and months and months. Along with that coverage has come an equal response of care.

This edition of The Baptist Record is a reminder. A reminder not of just what happened, not even a reminder of what was, but also a reminder of the incredible lesson that many of us have learned through Katrina. Without a doubt she has been a somewhat harsh teacher. So many of us have learned what we already knew. The truly valuable things in life, the meaningful things, and the things worth holding are not just trinkets and toys, fluff and stuff, appliances and other accumulations. Life at its essence and life at its highest involves other things. How many thousands of folks across Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana have discovered in the past months that home is still special in a beautiful house or in a small trailer provided by the government?

For many this Christmas was a very different Christmas but a wonderful experience. Everything from the past —

decorations and accumulated physical memories — were all gone. They were washed out to sea, ruined by the water or wind, or attacked by the quiet assault of mold. They were no more. What remains were those things that cannot be taken — cherished relationships, good and blessed memories, and a faith that has shown itself to be stronger than the winds or water or any storm.

In the aftermath of Katrina we have all been reminded of the implied and clear Biblical answer to the question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" It is a resounding, "Yes!" It has been astounding to watch and experience the response of people from everywhere who have said, "I want to help. I want to give. I want to come. I want to build. I want to bring. I want to feed. I want to clothe." It has been astounding to see them as they carry out those desires. People all across Mississippi have been compassionate and incredibly generous. The caring has had no state boundaries, religious, or philosophical restraints.

This edition of The Baptist Record filled with sights, sentences, and syllables is about renewal. In the face of the greatest national disaster in the history of Mississippi, people and specifically Mississippi Baptists are rising up out of the doom and debris, the chaos and the clutter with hope, confidence, and faith in the future. Whatever else seems to be in control or out of control, God is still on the throne.

The week following the storm those cluster groups of people referred to as churches begin to gather on the Lord's Day on lawns, in parking lots, and sometimes in partially destroyed buildings. They came in what they had on because what they had on was all that they had. They sang, prayed, and listened for a Word from God with an altogether fresh approach. They worshiped God with a glorious new feeling not because of some new program, fresh new tune, or insightful new message but because their need was so deep and the resources and goodness of God were even deeper. It would not take many days for people to begin to realize that there was no easy fix and no quick return to life, as it was once known. There would be difficult days ahead, hard work, and even new trials. Still the spirit of God among His people could continue to lift, encourage, and renew.

As the calendar moves along we naturally grow weary. Time seems to be the greatest test of faith. Anyone can believe God for the instantaneous results — the quick fix — the immediate miracle, but when trusting God drags out, the work is slow, and the results are not dramatic, then faith can fizzle. We begin to learn what Noah faced — building and believing but not much seeing! Days passed, then weeks, months, and decades and there was so little to show for it. Often all Noah could have said was, "I trust God!" So in the face of trials, troubles, storms, and struggles, we too must trust God for the future. Whatever else seems to be in control or out of control, God is still on the throne.

The author may be contacted at P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. E-mail: jfutral@mbcb.org.

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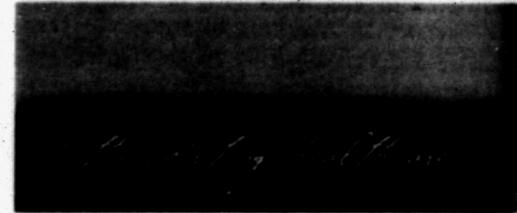
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Pearl River Baptists skip headlines, touch community

By William H. Perkins Jr.
Editor

Hurricane Katrina's damage to New Orleans may be getting the bulk of publicity these days with little time left over for the Mississippi Gulf Coast, but Carl Myers doesn't want people to overlook Pearl River County.

The missions director for Pearl River Association, located outside Picayune near the McNeil community, said his area was slammed hard by the record-breaking storm, too.

"Pearl River Association was hit, as far as the winds, just about as hard as Gulf Coast Association (Hancock, Harrison, and Stone Counties) and the entire Gulf Coast. We saw the 140-150 mile-an-hour winds. The eye (of Hurricane Katrina) did come over all of Pearl River County, so we had a lot of evacuees in Picayune and Poplarville sheltering from the coastline and from New Orleans," Myers said.

Most people who have traversed Pearl River County since the storm — Interstate 59 neatly splits the county into east and west segments — are awestruck by the damage, especially to the timber.

"We saw the effects of the wind and rain in our area. The damage would be from the winds and the tornadoes that were spawned in the storm. Roads were just covered with trees in both directions. We got it from the first part of the storm and then after the eye came through," Myers said.

Like Mississippi Baptist churches to their east along the Gulf Coast, Pearl River Association churches leaped at the challenge presented by the storm's devastation.



ON THE SCENE — Members of the Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief Task Force remain on the scene of Hurricane Katrina's devastation, more than four months after the killer storm unleashed its full fury on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. At Pearl River Association's headquarters outside Picayune near the McNeil community, volunteers prepare meals for workers arriving from across the country to assist in recovery efforts in that particularly hard-hit area of the state. (Photo by William H. Perkins Jr.)

"A good number of our churches were servicing families because of isolation and (lack of) communication. We had different churches set up as a local place for food. We have several (churches) that are Red Cross certified for shelters. As supplies started coming in, different quadrants of the association... received goods and distributing goods," Myers said.

"Within a week-and-a-half to two weeks after the storm, volunteers were coming in to help clean up. Our association facility has two lodges and we were not damaged too severely. We were able to use those so we could house up to 120 people as far as beds and then some more could be on cots on the floor. We were receiving folks from different parts of the country. In

the course of about a month-and-a-half to two months, we've had 25 states represented."

Meanwhile, Pearl River Baptists were helping their neighbors with debris removal, chain saw crews to cut trees off houses, and mud-out workers to clean up the mess left inside homes.

Pearl River Association has even taken in volunteers who were assigned to areas of the stricken Gulf Coast where housing for them was non-existent. Myers said although the volunteers are driving 35-40 miles to their assigned areas each day, they have expressed their appreciation for Pearl River Association's willingness to help them — help without which many of the groups would not have been able to come to Mississippi.

"We still have a lot of volunteers coming in. That's our focus and probably will be for the next two months," Myers said.

Many storm victims who have been blessed by the efforts of Mississippi Baptists and others over the past four months often ask relief workers why they are willing to help total strangers get their lives back together. Myers has a quick response.

"That answer would be easy. I think that's what Jesus would want us to do. In doing that, we make an impact in people's lives. We are being Christlike and feel that will help folks understand that there's faith, hope, and love in Jesus Christ. That's what the church should be doing.

"This catastrophe has given the church an opportunity to impact people's lives that we may not have had otherwise. I just hope we as Christians — we as Baptists — will take that opportunity and make the most of it."

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NECC students find joy in ministry



HELPING HANDS — Northeast Mississippi Community College students Diana Franklin (left) of Bruce and Marleisha Wallace of Tupelo assist The Salvation Army in distribution of food to Hurricane Katrina victims in the LaPlace, La. Area during an October mission trip. A total of 34 Northeast students participated in the trip. The school is located in Booneville. (Special to The Baptist Record)

By Anne Marie Chandler
Correspondent

Tents. Cots. Cold showers. Long van rides. Most college students would not give up their weekend for activities like these.

However, this is just what 34 students from Northeast Mississippi Community College (NECC) in Booneville did on October 14 to help the victims of Hurricane Katrina, which struck the Mississippi Gulf Coast on August 29 and led to devastation there and in the New Orleans area.

These students ventured to LaPlace, La., near New Orleans to volunteer in several different ways for The Salvation Army. Students assisted with data entry as well as providing food to New Orleans residents and relief workers.

"One thing I learned in my short time working with The Salvation Army is God can use you in anything and everything," said William Brock, a sophomore at Northeast.

Many different experiences showed that much can be done to help those in need. The 34 students who volunteered were split up to help with eight-hour shifts of data entry, sorting various items into boxes that were sent out to Katrina victims, and working from trucks called "canteens" where they were able to provide warm meals, water, and if possible pray and minister to people who had lost everything.

Through this experience they were able to see the progress that was actually happening and how grateful everyone really is for the help. "God showed me that even though you may lose everything, you can still have hope — and

God uses us for that!" said Daniel Brown, one of the Northeast students who worked in data entry.

While some of the students stayed at headquarters to input data on computers, others were sent out into New Orleans to help those in need. "It was a very humbling experience. People were coming home for the first time to nothing, but they were motivated to stay and start over," said Marleisha Wallace, a Northeast student who had the opportunity to work on a canteen.

Going to LaPlace showed the students that although there is a lot still left to be done in the recovery from Hurricane Katrina, there are people sacrificing their time and money to help those in need — and making a positive impact.

"Neighbors don't just live next door. Neighbors consist of our fellow man. God commands that we love our neighbors as ourselves. Louisiana residents are our neighbors and it is our job to reach out to them," said Northeast student Josh Latch about his experience in LaPlace.

The Northeast students agreed that serving others under such circumstances is a rewarding experience not only for the joy seen on people's faces, but also because of the opportunity to serve God.

Chandler is a member of the Baptist Student Union at Northeast Mississippi Community College in Booneville.

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LifeWay in Gulfport reopens after Katrina ruins inventory

GULFPORT, Miss. (BP and local reports) — The LifeWay Christian Store in Gulfport reopened December 8 amid great anticipation from customers and employees concerned about the store's status in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

"Normalcy never looked so good," said Alicia Lowery, manager of the store in a region still in the throes of Katrina's destruction. Three LifeWay stores in Mississippi and Louisiana were closed by the storm. LifeWay operates four stores in Mississippi: Gulfport, Jackson, Southaven and Tupelo.

"Customers have been calling and coming by hoping that we are open," Lowery said. "Some (were) struggling with what to do about Christmas gifts this year. Some (needed) to replace their Bibles that were destroyed by the water. Churches (needed) complete communion sets because theirs were destroyed. We are excited about reopening to meet their needs."

Lowery evacuated the Gulfport store before Katrina hit on Aug. 29. When she was allowed to return to the area a week and a half later, she expected to find sobering evidence of the storm surge. To her surprise, the building was still intact.

"We had external damage and a hole on the side of the building that allowed rain and wind to destroy everything inside, including the merchandise," Lowery said. "I was just thankful that the store was still there."

Overseeing the store repairs and working with contractors has been a new experience for the 30-year-old store manager. In addition to making sure her

own house received a new roof, Lowery has spent the last four months overseeing construction and ordering new merchandise for the store.

"We literally had to start over," said Mick Houston, regional director of LifeWay Christian Stores central region. "We had to reorder the entire store and have been receiving those shipments the past few weeks." Among other challenges, the post office and other carriers were not able to maintain a guaranteed, consistent schedule due to transportation problems immediately after the storm.

"There was a time when I wondered if the store would ever again be like it was," Lowery said. "Then the painters came. It was amazing. That was the light at the end of the tunnel. The store looks beautiful, painted and with merchandise on the shelves. Especially compared to what it used to look like after the storm, it just looks beautiful."

"The staff has been wonderful," Houston said. "Many of them have been trying to get their own houses back together and deal with the storm situation, but they have been here every day working."

The Gulfport LifeWay Christian Store opened much faster than other area businesses because "the churches need us," Houston said. "We are a ministry tool and they need our support."

LifeWay's Gulfport store is located in the CrossRoads shopping center at 15128 Crossroads Parkway, Gulfport, MS 39503. Telephone: (228) 539-4263. For the locations of Lifeway's other Mississippi stores, visit www.lifewaystores.com.

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FULL-TIME MINISTER OF MUSIC: First Baptist Church, Scottsboro, Alabama, is seeking a full-time minister of music and worship leader. (Sunday am- live TV and radio). For more information call (256) 574-3308 or email musicsearch@fbc-scottsboro.org. Send resumes to First Baptist Church, c/o minister of music search committee, 215 South Andrews Street, Scottsboro, Alabama 35768.

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FAMILY BIBLE STUDY

Does Money Matter?

Luke 12:16-21, 27-28, 31-34, 42-44,48b

By Don Hicks

The story of the foolish rich man is a parable. A parable is a simple story told in common language to teach one main point. Jesus told his listeners the point of the parable before He began. Here is the way William Barclay translates Jesus' statement of purpose "Watch and guard yourself against the spirit which is always wanting more; for even if a man has an abundance his life does not come from his possessions."

Wouldn't it be sad if we were worth no more than the material things we possess from time to time? Besides Jesus telling us the man is rich we know from the rich details of Jesus' story that the man was rich. This man owned land and it was good fertile productive land. Apparently,

it had produced more than the bare necessities through the years because the man already had barns to store his goods. The implication is that these were perfectly good serviceable barns not needing replacement. Yet, this year the crops were extra good and there was more harvest than these barns could hold. Arrogantly the selfish owner decided to tear down these barns even if that was wasteful.

The foolish rich farmer felt he could make all of his own decisions and have his own way. It never occurred to him that he couldn't be certain of tomorrow let alone next year. It certainly was not in his thinking pattern to give away any of his produce to the needy or friends or apparently even his own family.

God reminded him his thinking pattern and life style were foolish. Then, Jesus to bring his point home more strongly repeated his teaching again at the end of the story. "That's how it is with the one who stores up treasures for himself and is not rich toward God," Luke 12:21 [HCSB].

Jesus went on to say "... do not worry about your life ... For your life is something more than food and your body than clothing," Luke 12:22, Barclay's translation. Then Jesus said, "Look at the lilies. See how they grow. They do not work; they do not spin, but, I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. If God so clothes the grass in the field, which is there today and which tomorrow is cast into the oven, how much more will He clothe you. O you of little faith?" (Barclay's paraphrase of Luke 12:27-28).

We need to live in faith. Jesus said, "Do not be afraid,

little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom," Luke 12:32 [NIV]. Isn't it a reassuring thought that if we live by faith we are in God's little flock? In fact, Jesus told the disciples "Seek his (God's) kingdom, and these things (necessary food and clothing) will be given to you as well," Luke 12:31 [NIV].

Jesus explains more about what He meant when He said God wants to give you the kingdom. This is the way The Message paraphrases it: "Be generous. Give to the poor. Get yourselves a bank that can't go bankrupt, a bank in heaven far from bank robbers, safe from embezzlers, a bank you can bank on. It's obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being." (Luke 12:33-34.)

Jesus went on to teach us to stay prepared — ready for action. The example Jesus used was servants waiting the return of their master from his honeymoon. Since there were no cell phones there was no

way for the servants to know when the wedding party would arrive. Jesus said these servants needed to be ready to open the door at the moment the master knocked. Jesus stressed they should be ready even if the master is delayed and arrived in the middle of the night. Isn't it reassuring that Jesus said the master would appreciate and reward the efforts of these servants?

Jesus said the master would show his appreciation by putting "on an apron, sit them at the table, and serve them a meal, sharing his wedding feast with them," Luke 12:37 [The Message]. This reminds me of Jesus tying on a towel and washing the disciples' feet. Another truth about preparedness is that it is to be in proposition to what we have been given. "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."

Hicks is a member of First Church, Clinton.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

"Live in Love"

Lesson Passage: Romans 12:9-21

By Shirley Heap

All of us want to be loved. Yet many times we do not express love to other people. As Christians, we are to love others in all situations. Loving unlovely people is very difficult at times. We cannot choose who we should love. To be an example of Christ our love should extend to all.

After 68 years of marriage a friend passed away. His widow, a very devout Christian, was speaking later to a group of younger women about long marriages. She made the statement that love was the key. She said, "Sometimes I really did not like him, but I always loved him." Jesus could say the same of us.

Let Love be Genuine, (Romans 12:9)

What is love? So many meanings are in our language today. Has the word been watered down in our society? We say we love things, activities, pets, etc. Many years ago I read the line, "we like someone because, we love someone in spite of?" That's a great perspective.

In the Scriptures Jesus speaks of love many times. Genuine love comes from God. God is love, and this great love imputed to us is pure, sincere, opposed to evil, and committed to all that is good. Our interactions with others daily should be screened through this genuine love that we, as God's children, have received from Him. "Walk in love, just as Christ also loved

you, and gave himself up for us..." (Ephesians 5:2). Paul could talk of this genuine love very emphatically. He knew how much Christ loved him to reach down and save an enemy of Christianity such as himself. Christ said, "Love your enemies..." (Luke 6:27)

Let Love Be Generous, (Romans 12:10-13)

Paul speaks of showing a deep concern for others above self. This Godly trait is one that shows a true Christian example to the world. Our families are foremost in our thoughts and deeds. Verse 10 speaks of this deep-rooted love extending beyond our own. These examples Paul speaks about are just one way we serve our Lord. We are His arms, feet, and mouth. Showing such a generous spirit to others can be the very instrument needed to point some to Christ. As we recognize how much our needs have been met through the love of Christ,

we see even a greater need to share with others, and to rejoice in doing so.

Let Love Express Humility, (Romans 12:14-16)

"Bless those who persecute us?" How in this world could someone do this? They could only do this by the indwelling love of God that is in each believers heart. Our Lord has done so much for us that our daily life should reflect these same blessings to all we meet. Humility is not a weakness, but a God given strength. Our thoughts should always esteem others over ourselves, always being thankful and congenial to our fellowman. Seeking the best for others is a revealing characteristic of a Christian. Humility often requires sacrifice.

Let Love Promote Peace, (Romans 12:17-21)

Paul sounds so much like Jesus speaking these lines. We might see the need for this teaching in Paul's day because of the strong "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" Old Testament teaching. Why

should Christians today need to hear these words? Because we must regularly evaluate our Christian walk with the thought in this Scripture. So often there is a revengeful spirit seen in the lives of professing Christians. Paul saw this in his day. We are free in the choices we make, but there are consequences for those choices.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers..." Have you ever experienced a situation where it seemed that peace was not possible? Paul tells us "on our part" live at peace. Many times "our part" as Christians can change the whole situation. Our feelings or emotions need to be sacrificed in order to honor Christ. Good will always triumph over evil.

As we close, 1 John 4:7 reminds us, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." Also, read John 13:35.

Heap is a member of Calvary Church, Waynesboro.

Guidelines for submitting news and photographs

THE BAPTIST Record

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

News submitted for publication in The Baptist Record must be either (a) typewritten, (b) neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper, or (c) neatly printed on standardized forms provided by the newspaper. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone.

News may be submitted electronically to the address below, and must be contained in the message segment of an e-mail form. Due to increasing virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted.

Photograph attachments are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs may be color or black and white. Instant photos and digital printouts

are not reproducible. Digital photos may be used if submitted as a JPEG file via either (a) e-mail, (b) three-and-a-half inch floppy disk, or (c) CD. Photos must be clear, sharp, and well-lighted.

All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to crop-

ping. Photographs must depict people. No landscape-, building-, or object-only photographs will be printed. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date.

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Submit news and photographs to The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. FAX: (601) 292-3330. E-mail: baptistrecord@mbcb.org.

Coast church grasps Katrina opportunities

By William H. Perkins Jr.
Editor

As the unimaginable power of Hurricane Katrina roared all around them in the darkness, 47 members of Diamondhead Church in Hancock County rode out the storm in the church — the newest portions of which had not yet been occupied after construction completion.

"It was unreal. We came (to the church) about 7 o'clock Sunday evening (August 28). The wind here started about 2:30 Sunday afternoon, with gusts. By 7 p.m., it was pretty strong," said Patricia Collier, the church's minister of music. "We were told by the news reports that the hurricane force winds started about 3-4 o'clock in the morning (August 29) and we know they continued until about 3-4 o'clock in the afternoon, so (there were) about 12 hours of hurricane force winds."

"In this newer section of the building, we never really felt afraid. We had the blinds up and were watching the storm out the windows. We did have to mop the floors; wind and water did seep in through the doors. The few occasions when we walked over to the other buildings, it frightened us. The sounds were very incredible," she said.

The area of Diamondhead closest to the coastline was almost completely destroyed. Diamondhead Church, situated north of Interstate 10, escaped with relatively light damage. The basement of the new construction, which was planned to be left unfinished until some time in the future, took on about three feet of water.

With vital transportation arteries destroyed or blocked by tons of debris, the Diamondhead community was isolated. Needs were great and resources scarce, but the members of Diamondhead Church went to work anyway.



COMMUNITY DEVASTATED — With tents in the background housing disaster relief volunteers, Diamondhead Church Minister of Music Patricia Collier surveys damage to the church's property and surrounding community. With Diamondhead isolated for days after Hurricane Katrina devastated the area, the church immediately began feeding and clothing victims and housing disaster relief volunteers. (Photo by William H. Perkins Jr.)

Immediately after the storm passed, the church opened a food pantry and clothing ministry. The church distributed supplies to stranded victims as soon as the supplies came in the church's door. Much of the effort required improvisation.

"We have a couple of magnolia trees near an old oak tree. The magnolia trees

bent with the storm, but the oak tree broke with the storm. That's what we've had to be — very flexible — since the storm, and that's how we've survived. It's been hard. It's been long," she pointed out.

God has provided, said Collier, the daughter of a Southern Baptist pastor.

"The owner of the Dairy Queen unloaded her freezer on us, knowing that she was going to lose it anyway. We began feeding people hamburgers, hot dogs, chicken strips — anything you can get at Dairy Queen, we fed them until Thursday morning (September 1)," she said. "We fed three meals a day, probably up to 2,500 meals a day."

Just as the food began to run out on Thursday, Collier said, help arrived and they were able to continue that vital ministry to the hurricane's many victims.

Diamondhead Church plans to remain deeply involved in the recovery of the local community, Collier stressed, adding that relief volunteers from across the country can expect to find an open door at the church.

"Long term, we're going to continue housing volunteers as they come down to help with the rebuilding down here. We have had probably 300-400 volunteers come through here already. They are staying in our downstairs unfinished basement," she said.

The volunteers' quarters won't be unfinished for much longer, however. "Noonday Baptist Association in Georgia has agreed to foot the bill to finish it out so that it's a nice place for the volunteers to stay for the next eighteen months, and we have committed to that," Collier said.

The church is still helping local residents clean up their property and rebuild their homes. "We're just really trying to reach out to our community," Collier pointed out, "and our building is just a tool for that."

Collier said Diamondhead Church members see the Hurricane Katrina tragedy as a special way to express the love of Christ to their community. "He is our reason for doing this. That comes back to Matthew 25 — if you've given them a cup of water, you've given it unto Me. That was what we needed to do, and we're going to continue to do that."

Thanks for a breath of fresh air

By Bill Warren
Correspondent

Southern Baptist volunteers, thank you! You have been a breath of fresh air for those of us who live along the Mississippi Gulf Coast in Hancock County.

The communities of Bay St. Louis (80% of the homes and buildings were obliterated or flooded), Waveland (90%-plus), Pearlington (nearly 100%) and Diamondhead (40%) all suffered catastrophic damage from Hurricane Katrina that affected both residents and businesses.

All but two of the eight Southern Baptist Churches in Hancock County — members of the Gulf Coast Association — suffered major damage. Because I am pastor of Diamondhead Church, one of the two churches that did not suffer major damage, and a professor at New Orleans Seminary, the sense of loss is personal. Yet that loss has opened a huge door of opportunity for ministry that our Southern Baptist volunteers are helping us to realize.

Hope is returning to Hancock County. With the vital help of Southern Baptist volunteers, three of the damaged churches are now at least partially usable, one more is already meeting in a temporary setting, and the other two are sites for repair or rebuilding. Opportunities wait around each corner.

The area has tremendous physical reconstruction needs, but the deeper needs are there as well. People in our area are living under a stress level that has led to relationship problems, anger, depres-

sion and despair due to the loss of loved ones, cherished belongings and the sense of security. Volunteers have been magnificent in helping remove debris, flooded possessions and sheetrock, and they are beginning to help rebuild some homes. An untold story is how they are bringing hope, support and Christian love that serve as a second level of Christian witness to hurting communities.

As an example, one Christian father, his two sons, his brother and brother's wife, were in their home during the storm. As the water crossed Interstate 10, his house was literally washed away as they struggled to leave and find higher ground. Miraculously, God guided them to safety. On the other hand, his house was gone, he had no flood insurance and his mortgage was still due. A team of volunteers brought some hope into his life as they helped to clear the rubble from his lot, moving it to the roadside for removal. Despair was not gone totally, but at least a light was starting to dawn as he was now able to receive a trailer on his lot as a temporary dwelling.

Tough times are still on the horizon, but our volunteers were bright lights bringing hope as they showed the love of Christ in action, word and attitude. Again, Southern Baptist volunteers, thank you!

Warren is the director of the center for New Testament textual studies and the Landrum P. Lovell II, professor of New Testament and Greek at New Orleans Seminary. His commentary appears courtesy of Baptist Press.